



# Bulletin

ARMENIAN  
INSTITUTE

ՀԱՅ ՀԻՄՆԱԿԻ

Volume 3, Issues 3 September 2010



Photo credit: John Hollingworth

## MY DEAR BROTHER: Armenians in Turkey 100 years Ago

### TREASURED OBJECTS: Armenian Life in the Ottoman Empire 100 Years Ago

The second exhibition organised by the Armenian Institute at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS opened its doors on May 1, 2010 and some 10,000 people visited before it closed on July 24. *My Dear Brother* had been granted a spot in 2012 but in late October 2009, AI was offered this much earlier date, due to a cancellation. Conceived and created by Osman Köker, based on his book of similar name, *My Dear Brother: Armenians in Turkey 100 Years Ago* had already opened to great acclaim in Istanbul, Yerevan, Geneva, Munich, Paris and other cities. Both book and exhibition are based on postcards from the collection of Orlando Carlo Calumeno. Diana and Panos Katsouris offered financial support immediately. The St. Sarkis Charity Trust joined with a

*"enthralling and captivating" "We heard growing up, how it used to be in the old country. Now we actually could see!" "A moving and very important exhibition." "This is the closest picture I have ever had of my ancestors whose name I bear. Thank you."*  
(Quotes from the Visitors' Book of the exhibitions)

The enlarged postcards on over 100 panels bore intriguing messages including one addressed to "My Dear Brother" (Մի՞րե՛լի եղբայրս), giving a name to the exhibition. From Istanbul to Van and Kars, Erzurum to Mersin, the images showed Armenian men, women and children at work and play. Some showed churches and schools, others factories and homes, countryside and city views, sports clubs, musicians, and craftsmen. Many visitors mentioned how moved they were to learn about the breadth of Armenian experience and geographic reach during the Ottoman Empire. The images showed a people truly integrated into society, making a wide variety of positive contributions to the fabric of everyday life, which, according to Osman Köker, is the purpose of the exhibition.

Mkhitarian and Hagop Varoujian. The AI Choir gave its first public performance with songs by Komitas and at each Opening, Osman Köker, with interpreter Elif Kalaycioğlu, gave a moving talk about the background to his research and writing and how he came to organise the exhibition.

Other events accompanied the exhibitions (described overleaf), ending with the first of what we hope will be a series of meetings and collaborations between Armenian and other artists in

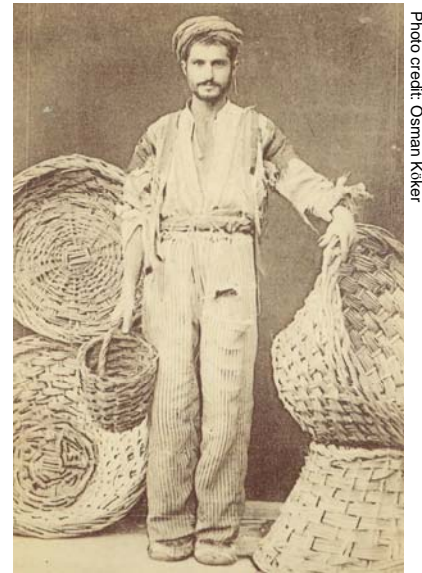


Photo credit: Osman Köker

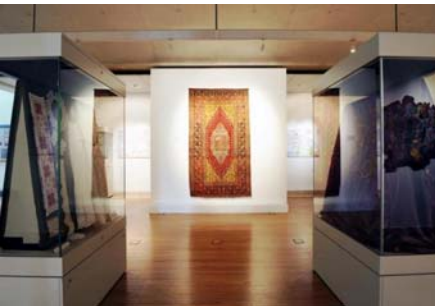


Photo credit: John Hollingworth

generous contribution, as did Bedo and Tania Eghianyan, making it possible to begin in earnest.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supported the accompanying lectures, film, storytelling, workshops and, most importantly an oral history-based second exhibition: *Treasured Objects* in a separate room at the Brunei. We sent out a request to London Armenians to lend objects from their households from the same period and region as the postcard exhibition and had a wonderful response, gathering fascinating and beautiful pieces, both everyday items and unusual ones. The two exhibitions complemented each other in very striking ways, bringing out different dimensions for the viewers. HLF also funded the creation of a short video, shown during the exhibition, of the lenders talking about the stories of their objects.

Two crowded receptions opened the exhibition. Those attending included Councillor Barbara Yerolemou, Mayor of Ealing, the Director and Pro-Director of SOAS. Entertainment was provided by santur player Peyman Heydarian, violinist Levon Chilingirian, singers Virginia Kerovpyan, Vigen Shahverdyan, and poetry read by Nvard Stepanian, Anna

the UK.

We wish to thank our funders, SOAS, Director of Brunei John Hollingworth, and all those who lent objects to the *Treasured Objects* exhibition. This was not an easy thing to do as the items are indeed "treasured" and to let them out of sight was a brave act. The objects themselves have lives of their own and their generous lenders have agreed that we can now create a booklet from the exhibition, detailing the narratives of their journeys. If you have objects that were not included in the exhibition but would be of interest to such a project, please let us know. read more about the exhibition and events, please see our upcoming Newsletter and website.



Photo credit: Gagik Stepan-Sarkisian

Photographs (clockwise from top right): Postcard exhibition; Basket weaver from Diyarbakir; Page from a jeweller's sketchbook; Treasured Objects exhibition.

### PARAJANOV UNCUT (Pushkin House, 14 April)

As part of the ongoing celebration of Sergei Parajanov, AI was pleased to support an evening with filmmaker and author **Levon Grigoryan**. Grigoryan, who assisted on the film showed rare excerpts from Parajanov's *Colour of the Pomegranate* (Նռան գոյնը), too controversial to be included in the official version released in 1968. Grigoryan continued the evening in conversation with **Nouritza Matossian**, writer and broadcaster.

### “KOTCHNAK” CONCERT (Brunei Gallery, 30 June)

Kotchnak, the Armenian music ensemble from Paris, sang songs of Komitas and other traditional pieces. Surrounded by the photographs in the Brunei Gallery, the atmosphere was poignant and the sounds resonated with the images. The voices were accompanied by *qanoon*, *dap*, and *kamancheh*. En route to a storytelling festival in Wales, Kotchnak added a new and welcome dimension to the exhibition.

### MURDER FILE HRANT DINK directed by Osman Okkan and Simone Sitte (Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS, 15 June)

This documentary combined insights into the life and work of Hrant Dink, interviews with family, friends and colleagues, and analysis of contemporary issues in Turkey. A short animated film by Maral Kerovpyan, *Öteki* (The Other) was also shown, having recently won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the Hrant Dink Foundation Films About Conscience festival.

Other events included **Heirlooms – Shared Tales** with **Vergine Gulbenkian** (Brunei Gallery, May 22) weaving her magic with storytelling from Armenian *ashoughs* and Turkish *ashiks* from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. **Taline Haytayan** led a children's storytelling workshop (Brunei, June 26) with the listeners turning performers as they acted out *The Talking Fish*. June 26 was a festival of workshops at the Brunei with artist **Will Maw** in charge of a Scan-athon, beginning an archive of scanned images from Armenian family photos. Maw later donated three collages created from these images. Fabric artist **Alex Watson** led a group in exploring ways to recycle hidden textile treasures while others admired new objects added to the *Treasured Objects* exhibition.



Kutahya plate exhibited at *Treasured Objects*.



### MY DEAR BROTHER: ARMENIAN LIFE IN TURKEY 100 YEARS AGO

Project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund supported a variety of events connected with the Brunei exhibitions. HLF's contribution will continue into the autumn with further oral history collection and workshops and the creation of a booklet of the *Treasured Objects*.

### WESTERN ARMENIAN LITERATURE AT THE END OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE with Dr Laurent Mignon and Dr Victoria Rowe. (N Gulbenkian Hall, 9 May)

In his talk Dr Mignon explored the role of the Armeno-Turkish novel in the development of modern Turkish literature and its place in official Turkish literary historiography. Dr Rowe spoke on women writing the Ottoman Armenian experience, discussing cosmopolitanism, and constitutionalism in contemporaneous literature by authors such as Dussap, Yesayan and others. Literary texts by these women offer unique insights into the private lives and struggles of Armenian women and men at a time of explosive cultural and political tumult.

### KHARPERT AND ITS GOLDEN PLAIN: A CASE STUDY IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF ARMENIAN COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS, 1871-1878 by Ara Sarafian (Brunei, 12 May)

Historian and director of the Gomidas Institute Ara Sarafian discussed the transformation of the Armenian *millet* in the Kharpert plain following the Ottoman Armenian National Constitution of 1864. His lecture looked at the larger processes that were at work in communal development, as well as the specific changes in Kharpert.

### OROR MAYR HAYASDANIN: ON HOME, DISPLACEMENT AND THE ARMENIAN LULLABIES by Melissa Bilal (Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS, 7 June)

Melissa Bilal, University of Chicago, presented ethnographic and historical accounts of Armenian lullabies expressing gendered experiences of home as well as evolving ideas of homeland. Examples were heard demonstrating Bilal's thesis that the lullabies function on the margins of belonging and displacement, memory and the impossibility of memory.



Collage by Will Maw.

The final event of the Brunei season was conceived as a stimulus to bring young Armenian artists together to consider potential collaborations. An earlier meeting gave the group an opportunity to view the exhibitions and discuss possible responses, as individuals and together. The results were very exciting and we hope this kind of work will continue in the future. **Talar Aghbashian**, **Nairy Afrikian**, **Karen Babayan** and **Will Maw** brought works to be displayed among the *Treasured Objects*, each having thematic connections to memory, displacement and loss. On July 7, a new DVD was added to our oral history film. Created by **Anahide Pilibossian** from photographs taken by friends, the DVD showed current images of the regions shown in the postcard exhibition. *Öteki* (The Other) by Maral Kerovpyan was also added to the DVD loop. The evening continued as guests filed down the stairs to hear **Aris Nadirian** sing, **Astghik Vardanyan** on violin, and **Janna Tonaganyan's** Aros Quartet play pieces by Komitas. The finale was unexpected in its impact as **Seta White**, **Steven Ounanian**, **Nairy Afrikian** and **Louisa Gummer** stood in four corners of the darkened gallery and began in whispers to read excerpts from the postcards. As their voices grew louder, they seemed to bring the writers to life in conversation with each other, in Armenian, in English, and finally sinking back to silence again.